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Fifth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 1734 (2006), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) until 31 December 2007 and requested me to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the role played by the Office with a view to developing its exit strategy. In my fourth report on UNIOSIL (S/2007/257), I indicated my intention to conduct a comprehensive assessment and to submit to the Council my recommendations on the future United Nations presence in the country. To that end, I dispatched an interdepartmental technical assessment mission, led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which visited Sierra Leone from 15 to 25 October. The present report provides an update on major developments since my previous report and sets out my recommendations on the mission's exit strategy and the future United Nations presence in the country.

II. Major developments

2. During the reporting period, events in Sierra Leone were dominated by the organization and conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections. The elections, which were originally scheduled for 28 July, were eventually postponed until 11 August because the Sierra Leone Parliament did not accede to the request of the National Electoral Commission for its early dissolution.

3. Seven political parties, including the three major political parties — the All People's Congress (APC), the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) and the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) — participated in the parliamentary elections of 11 August, and seven candidates contested the presidential elections. There were no female presidential candidates. APC won 59 of the 112 parliamentary seats, PMDC won 10 and SLPP won 43. Only 16 women won seats, as opposed to 18 in the previous Parliament. Some 9,000 national observers representing 53 civil society organizations and 447 international observers from various regional and international organizations monitored the elections.

4. None of the presidential candidates reached the constitutional threshold required to win the election, which is 55 per cent of the vote. Accordingly, a presidential run-off election was held on 8 September between the two candidates

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who had received the highest number of votes in the first round: Ernest Bai Koroma, the leader of APC, and Solomon Berewa, the then Vice President of Sierra Leone and the SLPP candidate. On 17 September, the National Electoral Commission announced that Mr. Koroma had obtained 54.6 per cent and Mr. Berewa 45.4 per cent of the total number of valid votes cast in the run-off elections. Mr. Koroma was declared to be the duly elected President of Sierra Leone and was sworn in on the same day.

5. Although the elections were considered to be largely peaceful, transparent and credible, they were held against a backdrop of heightened tension and violent clashes among the supporters of the main political parties. Several initiatives were taken to defuse the tense political situation in the days leading up to the elections. The Political Parties Registration Commission organized peace marches throughout the country and hosted high-level meetings with party political leaders to underline the need for compliance with the Political Parties Code of Conduct.

6. On 1 September, a high-level delegation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, comprising the President of the Commission, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Foreign Ministers of Burkina Faso and Nigeria and the High Commissioner of Ghana to Sierra Leone, visited the country and met the then President, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, as well as the two presidential candidates, to urge them to work towards ensuring that the run-off election was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere.

7. The 2007 national elections were the first elections to be organized and conducted by the Sierra Leonean authorities since the withdrawal in 2005 of the peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. UNIOSIL and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical and financial support for the elections. UNIOSIL also played a critical role in defusing political and ethnic tensions, which had threatened to derail the electoral process, and in supporting the actions taken by the National Electoral Commission to address electoral fraud during the presidential run-off election. In particular, the Office organized a series of inter-party workshops that were attended by all registered political parties. It also provided support for the work of the Political Parties Registration Commission and the national and district monitoring committees of the Political Parties Code of Conduct through advisory and mediation services and training.

8. In the months leading up to the elections, a number of violent clashes were reported among supporters of SLPP, APC and PMDC. The tension was especially high in the eastern and southern parts of the country — areas traditionally controlled by SLPP, but where APC and its electoral ally, PMDC also conducted their campaigns. On 27 August, President Kabbah, concerned about the intensity of the clashes, publicly appealed for restraint and threatened to institute a state of emergency in an effort to bring the situation under control. On 2 September, at a meeting convened by President Kabbah, the two main presidential candidates signed a communiqué condemning the increasing intimidation, harassment and violence and committing themselves to the peaceful conduct of the run-off election. They also met separately on 6 September with representatives of the diplomatic community and UNIOSIL to recommit their parties to ensuring full compliance with the communiqué.

9. Although tensions have largely subsided, there are still reports of isolated cases of residual, election-related violence. For example, on 11 November, supporters of SLPP clashed with supporters of APC and PMDC in Tongo, Kenema District, resulting in injury to three people. On the same day, young people from APC and PMDC threw stones at an SLPP Member of Parliament in the same area, claiming that he had intimidated them under the previous Government.

10. UNDP established and managed a basket fund through which the development partners of Sierra Leone channelled financial contributions to the electoral process. The Governments of Denmark, Ireland (through Irish Aid), Japan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (through the Department for International Development (DFID)), as well as the European Union, made generous contributions to the fund, for which I am grateful. The United States of America also supported the elections through funds made available by the United States Agency for International Development, while the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund paid the salaries of some 37,000 polling staff during both rounds of the elections.

11. On 19 September, President Koroma established a transition team, headed by the Vice-President, Samuel Sumana, to work with the outgoing Administration to ensure a smooth transition to the new Government, prepare a comprehensive account of the assets and liabilities of the State, identify measures or actions awaiting implementation and make recommendations on possible follow-up actions by the new Government. The team submitted its findings and recommendations on 16 October. The findings revealed corruption and widespread mismanagement of State resources due to institutional and systemic weaknesses and the lack of effective internal mechanisms for control, monitoring, supervision or accountability with regard to expended resources.

12. On 5 October, during the State address at the opening of Parliament, President Koroma outlined his Government's priorities as being the maintenance of national security, the promotion of national reconciliation and unity, the protection and promotion of human rights, respect for the rule of law, the creation of a disciplined and effective civil service, the empowerment of the Anti-Corruption Commission, improved regulation of mineral resources, the strengthening of decentralization and rural development, the revitalization of the economy, the creation of a vibrant private sector and employment opportunities, especially for young people, the provision of improved health-care services and the expedited delivery of electricity and water.

III. Technical assessment mission

13. The technical assessment mission, which was led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and which visited Sierra Leone from 15 to 25 October, comprised representatives from the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, the Peacebuilding Support Office, UNDP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The team met with a wide cross section of Sierra Leoneans, including Vice-President Sumana, and international stakeholders in the peace consolidation process. It also visited the Kenema District, in the eastern province of Sierra Leone. The findings of the technical assessment mission are set out in sections IV to XIII below.

IV. Security situation

14. The security situation in Sierra Leone has remained stable but fragile. The main threats to the stability of the country emanate from the high level of unemployment among young people and the poor social and economic conditions of the majority of the population.

15. Sierra Leone is facing a severe financial crisis, which began in April as a result of limited State revenues. The crisis is adversely affecting the operational capacity and the morale of the Sierra Leone Police and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, which are not receiving the funds required to purchase fuel and rations. If not addressed promptly, this situation could pose a threat to the security of the country.

16. The security situation along the borders with Liberia and Guinea remains stable. However, the situation in Guinea continues to be a source of concern. Any massive influx of Guinean refugees into Sierra Leone in the event of a crisis in Guinea could potentially destabilize the fragile situation in Sierra Leone. Moreover, there are continuing tensions between Sierra Leone and Guinea over the border town of Yenga, which is still being occupied by Guinean armed forces personnel. The Government of Sierra Leone advised the assessment mission that it intends to resolve this issue through diplomatic channels. In the meantime, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces have been conducting patrols concurrently with military personnel of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) along the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone.

V. Reform of the security sector

A. Sierra Leone Police

17. UNIOSIL is assisting the Sierra Leone Police, whose strength currently stands at 9,200 personnel, including some 1,550 female officers, in its efforts to reach its pre-war benchmark of 9,500 police personnel. The Office is also providing the Sierra Leone Police with training and mentoring in crowd control and the maintenance of public order. It also works closely with the police force to promote gender-mainstreaming activities and collaborate on workshops aimed at improving procedures and practices for addressing gender-based violence in the country. UNIOSIL was instrumental in assisting the Sierra Leone Police in developing security operation plans, in line with democratic standards of policing, for the electoral process.

18. Despite those achievements, the Sierra Leone Police continues to be hampered by a lack of vehicles, communications equipment, handcuffs, flashlights and batons, as well as inadequate barracks accommodation. Moreover, as mentioned in paragraph 15 above, the Government has not provided the police with the funds required to purchase essential supplies such as fuel and rations. As at 31 September, only 37 per cent of the $6.6 million allocated for the Sierra Leone Police in the 2007 national budget had been disbursed.

19. The Sierra Leone Police still needs assistance in developing a professional standards division to strengthen the internal investigations system for officer

misconduct, a nationwide plan aimed at improving the substandard conditions of the many police detention facilities, as well as policies aimed at combating sexual harassment and discrimination, strengthening the capacity of the Sierra Leone Police family support units and reducing the incidence of narcotic and human trafficking through Lungi International Airport. Its trainers also require training in public order management, beat patrols, human rights practices, crime response and the prosecution of cases.

B. Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

20. UNIOSIL has continued to liaise with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police, in cooperation with the International Military Advisory Training Team, which is led by the United Kingdom, and other partners, in order to monitor and report on the security situation in the country and to make recommendations concerning external and internal threats. UNIOSIL has also continued to cooperate and exchange information with UNMIL, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations Office for West Africa, the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Mongolian Guard Force of UNMIL on security-related issues.

21. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces are being trained and mentored by the International Military Advisory and Training Team, with the support of DFID. The Team, with the assistance of UNIOSIL, is also working closely with the armed forces to adjust the force strength from 10,500 to 8,500 military personnel in order to create an affordable army with improved deployment capability and enhanced operational and logistical performance. During the national elections, the armed forces military police were deployed alongside the Sierra Leone Police in high-threat areas, such as Freetown, helping to stabilize the country during periods of heightened political tension.

22. The armed forces continue to face serious challenges. Almost half of the military personnel and their families are housed in substandard conditions, which is having a negative effect on the morale of the troops. The main barracks in Freetown are overcrowded, with some families living in stores and armories with no access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation. Similar unsatisfactory conditions exist in the military barracks in the provinces. Efforts are under way to improve living conditions in the three barracks in Freetown using funds provided by the Peacebuilding Fund. Although the terms and conditions of service of the armed forces personnel were recently revised, concerns remain about whether the Government will be able to meet the commitments that it made, given its current financial crisis. Moreover, a number of welfare issues, including outstanding retirement and severance benefits, still need to be resolved.

C. Office of National Security

23. UNIOSIL has helped to strengthen the capacity of the security sector by providing technical and operational planning support to the Office of National Security, as well as district and provincial security committees, especially in the areas of intelligence-gathering and analysis.

VI. Human rights and the rule of law

24. Steady progress has been made in strengthening the rule of law, promoting the independence of the judiciary, building the capacity of the police and the corrections system and promoting respect for human rights.

25. UNIOSIL is supporting the Government's efforts to reform the justice sector by providing technical support to implement the justice sector project, which is funded by the Peacebuilding Fund and is aimed at strengthening the prosecutorial system and the Family Support Unit of the Police. It is also supporting the Justice Sector Development Programme, which is funded by DFID, and providing technical assistance for the constitutional review process and the Law Reform Commission on issues pertaining to human rights and the rule of law. In addition, the Office continues to monitor adherence to human rights standards and to report on violations, including those perpetrated by some elements in the national security community. It is also assisting in establishing human rights committees in rural areas and continues to provide basic human rights training to various national stakeholders. In May, UNIOSIL conducted a nationwide survey of prison conditions, including a review of the national prison laws of 1960 and 1961, and made recommendations to improve conditions in such facilities.

26. Some progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The report of the Commission has been widely distributed among stakeholders. The task force set up by the Government to advise on the structure, institutional framework and modalities for the establishment of the reparations programme has concluded its work, and its report has been approved by the Government. However, actual implementation of the programme has yet to commence. In accordance with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, President Koroma recently indicated his intention to separate the Office of the Attorney-General from that of the Minister for Justice.

27. A National Human Rights Commission was established and efforts are under way to build its capacity. The national action plan for human rights is still being developed. Four bills relating to women's and children's rights, including the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorces Bill, the Intestate Succession Bill, the Domestic Violence Bill and the Children's Rights Bill, which were recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have been enacted. In addition, progress has been made in mainstreaming human rights in civil society organizations, local district councils and Government institutions.

28. To date, the Government of Sierra Leone has not complied with its reporting obligations under four United Nations human rights treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. UNIOSIL is providing technical support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to enable it to submit reports to the relevant treaty bodies.

VII. Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

29. Some progress has been made in implementing the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. A gender theme group has been established within the United Nations country team, and broad-based consultations are ongoing with women's advocacy groups and other civil society organizations relating to the implementation of the resolution. In the coming months, it will be important to increase advocacy efforts and political support to address gender disparity, including traditional practices harmful to girls' and women's health and development and to the advancement of women, especially in the context of the 2008 local council elections.

VIII. Public information/United Nations Radio

30. UNIOSIL has continued to promote a culture of peace, dialogue and participation on national issues, in particular through United Nations Radio. Both international and national interlocutors expressed the view that United Nations Radio was an effective and valued component of UNIOSIL, providing balanced and non-partisan news and information. In addition, they informed the assessment mission that the success of the recent elections and the peaceful transfer of power to a new Government could be partially attributed to the balanced news and commentary provided by United Nations Radio, especially during periods of heightened political tension.

31. The key challenge for UNIOSIL in the transition period will be to effect the transition from the United Nations Radio station to a national independent and capable radio service, which is currently unavailable. The transition process will require technical and financial support from the United Nations system and the international donor community. In particular, UNIOSIL will need to oversee the transfer of broadcasting equipment and manage transitional legal and editorial issues with national partners, while national stakeholders will need to ensure that they have the funding and the administrative and technical resources to inherit and sustain an independent national radio programming and broadcasting service.

32. United Nations Radio has taken some steps towards becoming a locally based radio service through its joint programming arrangements with national partners, including Cotton Tree News of the School of Mass Communications of the University of Sierra Leone, supported by the non-governmental organization Hirondelle Foundation of Switzerland; the Independent Radio Network, a grouping of more than 20 local radio stations, which receives training assistance from the BBC World Service Trust; and Talking Drum Studio, which produces non-news social development programming with support from the non-governmental organization Search for Common Ground, based in Washington, D.C.

IX. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission

33. The Peacebuilding Commission has continued to focus on the four priority areas identified by the Government of Sierra Leone and endorsed by the Commission, namely, youth employment and empowerment; good governance; security sector and justice sector reform; and capacity-building for service delivery.

34. During the reporting period, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government worked on developing a peacebuilding cooperation framework, which builds upon existing national strategies. This framework will serve as a critical tool for expanding cooperation between the international community and the Government of Sierra Leone. It will also contribute to enhancing dialogue and strengthening partnerships between Sierra Leone and its international partners, mobilizing additional resources and providing political support for the implementation of existing national strategies, and addressing remaining peacebuilding gaps.

35. The Chairman of the Sierra Leone country-specific configuration, Frank Majoor, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations, visited Sierra Leone from 9 to 15 October to obtain first-hand information about the post-election situation and the peacebuilding priorities of the new Government and to discuss the ongoing work of the Peacebuilding Commission. During his visit, the Government reaffirmed its commitment to collaborate with the Commission.

36. The support of the United Nations, in particular UNIOSIL, has been critical in facilitating and advancing the work of the Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone. UNIOSIL has assisted the Government in formulating and implementing a priority plan for the Peacebuilding Fund and in developing the peacebuilding cooperation framework. Continued United Nations strategic support and coordination, as well as a high-level policy dialogue at the field level, including in the finalization, implementation and regular review of the peacebuilding cooperation framework, will remain critical to ensuring the successful engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone.

X. Future challenges

A. Economic progress

37. Despite the progress made in consolidating peace in Sierra Leone since the end of the conflict in 2002 and the sustained United Nations support for the development process, the situation in Sierra Leone remains fragile. Economic and social progress has been slow. Post-war economic growth has been about 7 per cent on average, while the inflation rate has been about 6.6 per cent. Economic reforms have contributed to lowering fiscal and external current account deficits and maintaining a relatively stable exchange rate. There has also been a marginal recovery in the agricultural, mining, construction and services sectors. Nevertheless, poverty remains pervasive, and the country's socio-economic indicators remain one of the lowest in Africa.

38. The Government will need to intensify its efforts to create conditions conducive to private investment and private sector growth as a means of generating employment. It will also be important to accelerate the implementation of the youth employment programme, funded by the Peacebuilding Commission, which targets some 8,000 beneficiaries. Additional programmes will also be needed to cater to the high number of young people who remain unemployed.

B. National reconciliation

39. The recent national elections exposed a deepening political schism and highlighted the increasing dominance of ethnicity and regionalism in the politics of

Sierra Leone, which, if not addressed, could have a negative impact on peace-consolidation efforts in the country.

40. On 14 November, senior executives of SLPP held a press conference in Freetown to complain about, inter alia, the invalidation by the National Electoral Commission of votes in 477 polling stations following the presidential run-off election and the dismissal by President Koroma on 12 November of two commissioners who had publicly dissociated themselves from the results of the election. Moreover, the SLPP executive boycotted the presidential inauguration ceremony on 15 November to protest against the dismissal of the commissioners. It is important that the Government continue its dialogue with political parties so as to reduce tensions and create a broad participatory process, especially in the lead-up to the 2008 elections.

41. Through advocacy and political dialogue, the United Nations will continue to work with the Government and other national stakeholders to build the skills and capacities of the political and civic leadership for constructive negotiation and dialogue; strengthen the mediation capacities of institutions such as the Political Parties Registration Commission and the provincial and district security committees; support the establishment of a national network of mediators; and encourage a vigorous campaign to promote tolerance among political parties and their supporters, particularly paramount chiefs. In this regard, the meeting of the President with 149 paramount chiefs on 8 October and the Government's reconciliation campaigns in opposition strongholds immediately following the elections are encouraging steps in the right direction.

42. There is also an urgent need to expedite the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on reconciliation, especially the reparations programme intended to address the plight of the victims of the civil conflict and the root causes of the war. This would however require the assistance of the donor community, as the Government does not currently have the funding required to implement the programme.

C. Strengthening the security sector

43. Notwithstanding the progress made in strengthening the security sector, the Sierra Leone Police and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces are continuing to face serious challenges. In the coming months, the Government will need to focus its efforts on improving the living standards of both the police and the army, equipping the police, fulfilling its commitment to meet the revised terms and conditions of service of the army and ensuring that funds are made available to sustain payments for fuel, rations and salaries for the security forces. It will also be important for the Government to continue its efforts to downsize the armed forces so as to create a leaner and more affordable army and to ensure that the security forces receive the training and equipment required to further enhance their capacity. In collaboration with UNIOSIL, the Sierra Leone Police is currently finalizing a list of priority equipment needed to increase its effectiveness. Once those priorities have been approved by the Government, I intend to appeal to the international community to contribute generously with a view to meeting those critical needs.

D. Devolution of power and decentralization

44. The pace of implementation of the decentralization programme and the devolution of power to the districts has been very slow. The local councils have inadequate financial resources and insufficient qualified personnel to carry out the planning and implementation of programmes. Among the many challenges facing the new Government will be the need to sensitize local communities regarding their obligation to pay taxes and levies, to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the chiefdom administrations and the local councils regarding revenue collection, and to conduct an early review of the Local Government Act of 2004.

E. 2008 local council elections

45. The Government has requested the United Nations to provide technical assistance for the local council elections currently scheduled for May or June 2008. It is expected that the same level of technical assistance provided by the United Nations for the 2007 general elections will be required for the local council elections, including the drawing-up of electoral wards, the updating and management of the voter register, the field coordination and training of National Electoral Commission personnel and the provision of operational and logistical support. The mediation capacity of the Political Parties Registration Commission will also need to be strengthened. In addition, the Government will need assistance in mobilizing resources and coordinating international assistance to the local councils.

F. Constitutional reform

46. As indicated in my fourth progress report, a Constitutional Review Commission was set up under the previous Administration to revise the 1991 Constitution. The review took into account the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the legal mechanisms required to deal with violations of basic rights and freedoms. The recommendations of the Constitutional Review Commission, which include proposed amendments to the Constitution, such as a revised definition of citizenship, the creation of a senate and the abolition of gender-related discriminatory practices, still need to be widely circulated and discussed.

G. Anti-corruption efforts and accountability

47. On the basis of the conclusions of the transition team's report, referred to in paragraph 11 above, and in line with the expressed commitment of President Koroma to pursue a vigorous anti-corruption campaign, efforts are under way to strengthen the role and independence of the Anti-Corruption Commission. The Government has replaced the leadership of the Commission and is currently reviewing the legislation governing its work. It has also expressed its intention to request the Commission to investigate cases of corruption and mismanagement identified in the report of the transition team.

48. The Government has released the national budget audit reports for 2002, 2003 and 2004, which had been requested by donors during the previous Administration.

It will, however, need to accelerate the review of the national anti-corruption strategy, which was supposed to have been completed in January 2007, and relaunch the implementation of the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact, which has been stalled owing to disagreements between the donors and the previous leadership of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

H. Building the capacity of Parliament

49. From 22 October to 2 November, UNIOSIL hosted an Inter-Parliamentary Union assessment mission, which, jointly with the United Nations country team, carried out a comprehensive capacity-needs assessment of the Parliament and held wide-ranging consultations with the Government, United Nations agencies, donors and development partners on a joint capacity-building programme. That assessment underlined the need for increased resources and capacity-building for parliamentarians to effectively enable them to exercise sufficient checks and balances on the executive branch. The new members of Parliament will need training on legislative debates, reform processes and oversight functions if they are to function effectively and fruitfully. In addition, sensitization on institutional and structural gender inequalities, which constitute obstacles to the empowerment of girls and women, will also need to be conducted.

XI. HIV/AIDS

50. The United Nations continued to provide technical support in the development of policies, strategies, guidelines and capacity in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention. The United Nations country team has assisted national efforts to combat HIV/AIDS through financial support for planning, implementation and evaluation of HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care programmes. In July, the Parliament passed a bill to protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. More than 1,200 people living with HIV/AIDS currently receive medical treatment and about 20,000 pregnant women per year receive a package designed to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Notwithstanding those achievements, serious challenges remain, including the need to ensure expanded access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care services, build the national capacity to deal with HIV/AIDS and help to ensure the better integration of the various HIV/AIDS-related interventions in existing national programmes.

XII. Conduct and discipline

51. During the reporting period, UNIOSIL focused on training and sensitizing its personnel in connection with the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and compliance with the Secretary-General's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. The mission organized two training-of-trainers sessions for agency focal points and one training session for personnel of the Special Court for Sierra Leone on sexual exploitation and abuse. No cases of sexual exploitation and abuse or related complaints against UNIOSIL personnel have been reported since my previous report.

XIII. Mission support

52. During the reporting period, the assets of UNIOSIL were used to support key operations of the mission and its partners. Currently, the Office provides surface transportation equipment for the movement of its personnel and critical water and sanitation services; air transportation equipment for the movement of United Nations personnel and supplies throughout the mission area; air operations/ safety oversight and movement control; communications infrastructure; information technology support; technical and maintenance services, including to United Nations Radio; fuel supplies to UNIOSIL and the UNMIL Mongolian Guard Force at the Special Court for Sierra Leone; power supplies to United Nations installations; engineering support to United Nations facilities, including camp management and critical generator maintenance; and medical services to personnel of UNIOSIL, the United Nations country team and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. It also coordinates integrated security services throughout the mission area.

53. UNMIL retains command and control of the Mongolian Guard Force, which provides security for the Special Court for Sierra Leone and manages related administrative aspects. However, UNIOSIL provides security at the Mongolian Guard Force camp site and logistical support, including power, water, accommodation, camp management, air transportation and movement, surface transportation, information technology and contracted catering services, to the Guard Force.

XIV. Recommendations of the technical assessment mission

54. The technical assessment mission, in consultation with UNIOSIL, recommended that the Office should be extended for a final period of nine months. During this period, UNIOSIL will continue to assist the new Government in supporting the 2008 local elections and constitutional reform, enhancing democratic governance, including anti-corruption efforts, and facilitating the engagement of Sierra Leone with the Peacebuilding Commission. In addition, the Office will continue its efforts to further strengthen the security sector, support national and local institutions in strengthening their capacities for the management, mediation and resolution of conflicts at both the national and local levels, assist in building the capacity of critical State institutions, including the National Human Rights Commission, support the reform of the judicial and corrections sectors, promote human rights, strengthen women's participation in the political process, complete the transition from United Nations Radio to a national independent public radio service, and support Government efforts to address the root causes of the conflict, as identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

55. The technical assessment mission also recommended that, upon the expiration of its mandate in September 2008, UNIOSIL be replaced by a leaner integrated political office, which would focus on carrying forward the peace consolidation process, mobilizing international donor support, supporting the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund and completing any residual tasks left over from the mandate of UNIOSIL, in particular promoting national reconciliation and supporting the constitutional reform process. The follow-on office should be led by the Department of Political Affairs, with support from UNDP, and should continue to serve the purpose of integrating the efforts of the

United Nations in Sierra Leone, the head of the office also serving as the UNDP resident representative and United Nations resident coordinator. In addition, the office should be provided with adequate resources to enable it to effectively carry out its mandated tasks.

XV. Observations

56. UNIOSIL has continued to make steady progress in implementing its mandate of supporting the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone to consolidate peace in the country and in ensuring an integrated approach to addressing challenges related to good governance, security, human rights and development. It played a significant role in building the capacity of the National Electoral Commission to conduct the presidential and parliamentary elections of 11 August, strengthening the Political Parties Registration Commission, supporting the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, strengthening the security sector, promoting human rights, supporting the reform of the judicial and corrections sectors, developing initiatives for the protection and well-being of women, children and young people, promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation and supporting the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund. The Office has also supported the Government's efforts to promote good governance, fight corruption, develop a national action plan for human rights, build the capacity of State institutions to provide basic services and address the root causes of the conflict.

57. Regrettably, notwithstanding the opportunities, resources and space provided by the international community with a view to enabling Sierra Leone to consolidate the peace and rehabilitate its economy, the country continues to face daunting challenges. The economic situation continues to be very difficult: poverty is widespread, food prices are rising and youth unemployment is worsening. A viable economy that can generate employment and sustainable public revenues has yet to be created. The new Government has inherited an empty treasury as a result of corruption and mismanagement of resources and is currently seeking donor assistance to fund up to 80 per cent of its national budget. It must also institute immediate measures to fight corruption. The release of the public accounts audited reports, the pledge by the newly elected President to declare his assets, his request that all nominees for appointment to public service positions do likewise, and his plans to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission, are encouraging.

58. The recent elections highlighted deep-seated political tensions and cleavages among the population of Sierra Leone along ethnic and geographical lines, which have the potential to escalate in the period leading up to the local government elections in 2008. Moreover, despite its remarkable success in the 2007 general elections, the National Electoral Commission still does not have the required capacity to conduct the 2008 local council elections and will therefore require the assistance of the United Nations.

59. In the security sector, despite considerable progress made in enhancing the professionalism and effectiveness of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police, both the army and the police continue to be plagued by logistical deficiencies and inadequate funding from the Government, which is still unable to sustain, on its own, the professional army and police force that the international community has helped to build. Given the ongoing political tensions

and lack of economic progress, there is a risk that the fragile peace could unravel if those issues are not addressed on a priority basis.

60. Taking into account the many complex challenges that continue to confront Sierra Leone, and the letter from President Koroma dated 22 October 2007, requesting further assistance from the United Nations (see S/2007/659), I recommend an extension of the mandate of UNIOSIL for a final period of nine months to enable it to perform the tasks highlighted in paragraph 54 above. During this period, UNIOSIL would take steps to progressively reduce its strength with a view to completing its mandate by September 2008. I intend to submit proposals concerning the drawdown of the mission, as well as the mandate, structure and strength of the successor office, as mentioned in paragraph 55 above, to the Security Council in my next report on UNIOSIL in April 2008.

61. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Government of Sierra Leone and its international partners for their close cooperation with UNIOSIL and the United Nations country team. I also extend my gratitude to ECOWAS and to those countries contributing military and police personnel to UNIOSIL for their continued support for the peace consolidation process in Sierra Leone. I would also like to thank my Executive Representative, Victor da Silva Angelo, and all the personnel of the United Nations in Sierra Leone, for their tireless efforts to help ensure that Sierra Leone achieves lasting peace and security and sustainable development.

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Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section